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**Animal and
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WILDLIFE SERVICES—OREGON

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Oregon

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Oregon Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Oregon is a diverse mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings with coastal, mountain, desert, forest, and agricultural environments. This ecological and geographic diversity gives the State a remarkably diverse range of wildlife species. WS biologists assist Oregon live-stock, timber, fruit, and grass-seed producers to reduce losses caused by predators, birds, and rodents. The program addresses serious beaver damage to transportation infrastructure, timber, and water control structures, and protects the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes. WS also assists in protecting natural resources, including threatened and endangered species, from wildlife predators.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Oregon:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs; including identifying potential disease transmission to people and livestock via goose feces
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Protecting timber and forest resources
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock and crop resources from mammalian and avian predators
- Protecting timber from bear and beaver damage
- Protecting grass-seed and other crops from Canada goose damage
- Protecting people and pets from injuries and diseases caused by wildlife, including predators like cougars, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, and bears
- Protecting passengers and aircraft and military operations from wildlife hazards at airports



technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Agriculture—Agriculture is an economic force in all 36 Oregon counties. A 1997 National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) study reported that Oregon farmers lost \$158 million in crops to wildlife damage. This damage affected 47 percent of Oregon's farms. Unfortunately, these losses are felt most acutely by small farmers and ranchers. Ninety-five percent of WS customers are small family farms. The NASS survey further documented that agriculture producers spent more than \$6 million on efforts to prevent wildlife damage. On average, each producer assisted by WS was able to prevent approximately \$3,100 in wildlife damage. During the past calendar year, WS assisted more than 2,200 agricultural producers, saving them a conservative estimate of more than \$6.9 million in avoided losses to crops and livestock. This savings represents a benefit:cost ratio of 3.45:1.

As a result of the NASS survey, the Oregon State Board of Agriculture passed a resolution recognizing the significant negative economic impact wildlife can have on Oregon's agricultural producers. The board also noted that assistance to producers should be increased to adequately address the problem. Many of these farms are struggling economically and depend on the timely, professional assistance WS provides to help protect their livelihood.

Oregon ranks number one in grass-seed production in the United States and produces the majority of the world's turf grass-seed supply. According to NASS, geese cause nearly \$6 million in damage to grass-seed crops alone and nearly \$15 million in damage to all crops.

WS assists nearly 200 farms in the Willamette Valley each year with their efforts to manage geese populations. WS distributes equipment and supplies to harass geese, works directly with producers in their harassment efforts, assists producers with State and Federal permit processes, devises new methods and techniques to disperse geese from fields, and documents types of damage and the magnitude of destruction. Based on producer estimates, WS' efforts have resulted in savings of more than \$4.50 for every dollar that is spent to manage the problem.

Protecting Public Health and Safety—Local cougar population densities exceed any documented in North America. Young and displaced cougars looking to establish their territories encroach on residential areas and threaten public safety. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Oregon State Police Wildlife Division (OSP) have increased their reliance on WS to investigate and resolve cougar conflicts. In 2002, WS responded to 121 threats to public health and safety posed by cougars in addition to 669 incidents of cougar predation on livestock. In addition, WS personnel have provided training for ODFW, OSP, and local law enforcement agencies on how to identify cougar signs, cougar victims, and implement cougar management techniques.

Protecting Air Travel—WS has assisted most of Oregon's major airports by providing technical assistance, conducting wildlife hazard assessments, writing wildlife hazard management plans, providing wildlife removal services, and training airport staff on ways to minimize wildlife threats to air travelers. WS also developed a habitat management plan for State Air National Guard facilities.

One major civilian airport contracted with WS to trap starlings after a serious aircraft strike with starlings occurred in the fall of 2000. An MD-80 jet carrying more than 250 passengers struck an enormous flock of starlings during take off. Birds were sucked into both of the jet's engines, forcing a difficult emergency landing. Both jet engines had to be replaced, at a cost of \$4 million. Fortunately, no one was injured.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—WS completed an Environmental Analysis for protecting the Federally listed threatened Western Snowy Plover on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service. These agencies have identified predation of plover eggs and young plovers as the most significant hurdle to restoring plover populations. Predators are responsible for more than 60 percent of all mortality of eggs and young despite extensive efforts by these agencies to halt predation with nonlethal management methods. The

Environmental Assessment analyzed an integrated approach for managing the damage, incorporating both nonlethal and lethal management measures. During the 2002 nesting season, predator management to protect plovers on State and BLM properties was determined to be beneficial by private, State and Federal biologists involved with the conservation of this threatened species. These biologists support predator damage management at additional nesting colonies along the Oregon coast.

Looking to the Future

Successful wolf reintroduction in Idaho means future wolf conflicts with livestock in Oregon. At least 3 wolves have entered Oregon from the experimental population in Idaho. FWS anticipates many more wolves entering Oregon in the future. WS' efforts to control predator damage caused by coyotes, cougars, bears, foxes, and bobcats will be hampered by the presence of wolves because traditional predator management tools will be restricted when wolves are present. Members of the Oregon Wolf Information Group, comprised of wolf advocate groups, State and Federal wildlife agencies, producer groups and WS, have indicated their desire to have WS investigate suspected wolf predation and conduct FWS authorized wolf management. As in other States where wolves have been reintroduced, the presence of wolves in Oregon will increase and complicate demands on the WS program.

Oregon Wildlife Services Funding •••••

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

